

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 066 397

SO 004 006

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TITLE Human Dignity Through History.
INSTITUTION Vallejo Unified School District, Calif.
PUB DATE 16 Feb 71
NOTE 12p.

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.65 HC-\$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Affective Objectives; Critical Thinking;
*Educational Objectives; Elementary Education; Group
Instruction; History Instruction; *Human Dignity;
*Human Relations; Secondary Education; Self Concept;
*Values
IDENTIFIERS Process Education; *Values Education

ABSTRACT

A major educational need, as assessed by a committee of teachers, students, and community members, is to recognize acceptance of human dignity as the ultimate value in decision making. This concept provides a basis for the elementary and secondary social studies program. Although the concept of human dignity was promoted with the signing of the Magna Carta, in reality society is not too concerned with the individual and human dignity. Program goals are to help each student develop a positive self image; and understanding of various groups of people; critical thinking skills to evaluate evidence and come to a logical conclusion; and experience in choosing between alternative values. Teaching approaches are future-, role-, and process-oriented, emphasizing inquiry methods to examine social problems and controversial issues. Classroom micro-societies provide students with opportunities to work together in groups. Course content focuses on ethnic studies and incorporates topical multi-media materials. Through the study of the social sciences, the student will demonstrate a growing appreciation of human dignity.
(SJM)

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HUMAN DIGNITY THROUGH HISTORY
by

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INTRODUCTION

The objectives of the program, Human Dignity through History, were developed on a basis of need assessment carried on by a committee of teachers, students and community members. A need may be identified as a discrepant event--one in which what is believed is quite different from what is actually practiced. One of the major needs that developed was one relating to a value system that recognizes the acceptance of human dignity as the ultimate value.

In the study of history, the concept of human dignity appears regularly. The struggle for human rights began in England with the signing of the Magna Charta in 1215. This was followed by the Petition of Rights and the Bill of Rights in 1689. In France, at the time of the French Revolution, a document was approved entitled, "The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizens." In the United States this concept was presented in the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and established as the law of the land with the ratification of the Bill of Rights of the U.S. Constitution in 1789. President Roosevelt in 1942 further expanded the concept of human rights with his statement on the four freedoms--Freedom of Speech and Expression, Freedom of Worship, Freedom from Want, and Freedom from Fear. Finally, in 1948 the United Nations adopted a Universal Declaration of Human Rights that stated: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights--and... none of the freedom and rights defined are to be denied because of race, color, sex, birth, or other status.

However, in terms of reality, we do not seem to be too concerned with the individual and human dignity.

1. Statement from the U.S. Riot Commission Report

"On July 28, 1967, the President of the United States established this Commission and directed us to answer three basic questions:

What happened?

Why did it happen?

What can be done to prevent it from happening again?

To respond to these questions, we have undertaken a broad range of studies and investigations. We have visited the riot cities; we have heard many witnesses; we have sought the counsel of experts across the country.

This is our basic conclusion: Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white--separate and unequal.

Reaction to last summer's disorders has quickened the movement and deepened the division. Discrimination and segregation have long permeated much of American life; they now threaten the future of every American."

2. National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence reported on December 12, 1969 that the gravest threat to the United States is no longer external but internal. The commission indicated the internal threats include haphazard urbanization, racial discrimination, disfiguring the environment and the dislocation of human identity and motivation. It further stated the greatness and durability of most civilizations has finally been determined by how they have responded to these challenges from within.

3. Education and Human Rights--A statement of the Phi Delta Kappa Commission on Education and Human Rights (Excerpt)

The concept of human rights is as old as man and goes to the very core of relationships among men. It is a dynamic force rooted in basic moral and ethical values.

If human potentialities are to be realized, society must be concerned not only with theoretical and philosophical concepts of human rights, but equally with translating these concepts into realities expressed in the behavior of free men. It is imperative that human beings live together in ways which accord each person, irrespective of biological and cultural differences, full dignity, respect, and value, simply because he or she is human.

4. Witness the fact that mental illness is the greatest cause of institutionalization and treatment in the United States and the increased problem of delinquency in youth with their increased use of drugs. Consider the problems confronting the world today: the housing problem, the traffic problem, the segregation problem, the credibility gap that at times involves News Management, the electric bugging problem, the supersonic jet problem, the frauds perpetuated by large corporations. All of these tend to deprive the individual of his identity and tend to dehumanize the individual.

As a result of their study of these conditions, the committee determined that the major emphasis of the Social Science Program would be developed around the concept of Human Rights with the goal of the program to develop in the student a value system that recognizes Human Dignity as the ultimate value in decision making.

If a program is to bring about a change of behavior that would be based on the recognition of human dignity as the basis for action, there are certain conditions that are requisites for success. These are:

- The student must have a good self-image.
- The student must have an understanding of other people who may be different.
- The student must have reasonable ability in reviewing evidence to arrive at reasonable decisions.
- The student must be cognizant of his value system and have some experience in choosing between alternative values.

SELF-IMAGE

If an individual is to treat others with dignity and respect, it is essential that he himself recognizes himself as having dignity. Therefore, one of the goals of the program involves the development in each student of a satisfactory self-image.

There are many who do not think that we are considering this in our present day curriculum. Dr. Neil Postman, one of the authors of TEACHING AS A SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITY,¹ states that in our schools, student self-awareness is not of value--even if today more Americans are hospitalized because of mental illness than any other illness, even if suicide is the second most common cause of death among teenagers.

Ole Sand, Director of Center for the Study of Instruction, NEA, states that students have had it with the kind of curriculum that they perceive as one of simonizing their education rather than humanizing their learning. They want a curriculum that confronts the facts of poverty, war, racism, riots, and urban decay. He further states that teenagers, along with younger students, want answers to perceived questions of "Who Am I?" and "Where Am I Going?"

A sad commentary on the times is the button students wear stating, "I am a human being--do not fold, spindle or mutilate."

The goal of a satisfactory self-image is not accomplished through the subject matter studied as much as through the personal relationships in the classroom. The teacher accepts the student as a partner in a learning situation. His ideas are accepted and shared. Students work in groups solving problems, exchanging and accepting each other's ideas. Inservice training can do much to provide the classroom atmosphere that will develop a good self image in the students. Such courses are now being offered under various titles, such as Self-Enhancing Education and Valuing in the Educational Process.

¹Postman, et al, Teaching as a Subversive Activity, Delacorte Press, New York, 1969.

UNDERSTANDING OTHERS

A second aspect of the program that must be carried out if we are to accomplish in our students an acceptance of the concept of Human Dignity as the ultimate value in decision making is an understanding of other people and an acceptance of people who are different.

In the analysis of this problem, there are two steps that will create a systematic approach to the problem:

1. The Social Scientists have developed a system of studying the way people act in their various goal-seeking activities called disciplines. These include Political Science, Economics, Sociology, Anthropology, Geography, Psychology, Philosophy, and sometimes History. If the student were to have some knowledge of these various disciplines, he would then have a systematic basis for comparing and contrasting various groups of people that may be studied.
2. Understanding others would involve the study of various groups of people, whether they be ethnic groups within our country or groups from other parts of the world with quite different backgrounds than ours. An understanding of why they think and act as they do may be clarified through the application of the criteria set up in the various disciplines. With understanding comes acceptance and with acceptance respect. The ultimate understanding that is desired is that these differences are important and valuable in this rapidly changing world in which we live.

CRITICAL THINKING

A third area of concern, if we are to develop in our students the concept of Human Dignity as the ultimate value in decision making, would relate to the pupil's ability to evaluate the evidences presented and come to a logical conclusion. For want of a better term in this discussion, we will refer to this process as critical thinking. Benjamin Bloom, et al, in the book, TAXONOMY OF EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES,² presents this type of thinking as the Cognitive Domain. The steps in their thinking process are developed as:

Knowledge
Comprehension
Application
Analysis
Synthesis
Evaluation

The method of instruction that emphasizes this skill in student learning is known as the Inquiry Method. It concentrates on the processes involved in learning rather than the acquisition of factual knowledge.

Dr. Neil Postman in his book, TEACHING AS A SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITY, describes the activities a teacher would use in an inquiry method as follows:

- The teacher rarely tells students what he thinks they ought to know.
- His basic mode of discourse with students is questioning.
- Generally, he does not accept a single statement as an answer to a question.
- He encourages student-student interaction as opposed to student-teacher interaction. And generally, he avoids acting as a mediator or judge of the quality of ideas expressed.
- He rarely summarizes the positions taken by students on the learnings that occur.
- His lessons develop from the responses of students and not from a previously determined "logical" structure.
- Generally, each of his lessons poses a problem for students.
- He measures his success in terms of behavioral changes in students.

² Bloom, et al, Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, McKay, 1965.

VALUE SYSTEM

A final consideration, if we hope to develop in the student a commitment to the idea of human dignity as the ultimate value in decision making, is the value system of the student himself.

In the previous section on Critical Thinking, we reviewed the steps to decision making as presented by Bloom et al in which evaluation was based upon a consideration of the various facts in the case. However, decisions are not made solely on the scientific evidence presented. The value system of the individual enters into the decision-making process and may not abide by the evidence presented by facts. Witness the number of people still smoking despite the fact that evidence indicates smoking cigarettes may lead to lung cancer and packages of cigarettes are required by law to carry that warning.

When a pupil comes to school for the first time, he brings with him a set of values that he has developed based upon his experiences up to that time.

Raths, Harwin and Simon in their book, VALUES AND TEACHING,³ define values as follows:

1. Values are the result of a valuing process.
2. The processes involved in valuing are:
 - a. Choosing
 - freely
 - from alternatives
 - after thoughtful consideration of the consequences of each alternative
 - b. Prizing
 - cherishing; being happy with the choice
 - willing to affirm the choice publicly
 - c. Acting
 - doing something with the choice
 - repeatedly, in some pattern of life

Therefore, in the education of the pupil we must give him the opportunity to choose between values. In providing students with these opportunities,

³Raths, et al, Values and Teaching, Merrill.

the instructor should not make a value judgment to the student. Rather, other values may be presented which the pupil will consider. Usually controversial issues carry differing value judgments and offer the student opportunities for valuing. Since they are relevant to the important issues of the day, they are fine opportunities for student involvement.

CURRICULUM ORGANIZATION

In the development of such a program, the organization of the curriculum would become a factor. As the present program was developed, the various elements were fitted to the curriculum as it presently exists. However, a suggested curriculum of the future by Dr. Dwight W. Allen, Dean of the School of Education, University of Massachusetts, presented some interesting ideas in a speech delivered at the Seventh Annual National Education Conference, Easthampton, Massachusetts. In his discussion on our preparation for the 80's, he states:

The curriculum of the future must avoid the strong commitment to factual knowledge and rote learning that characterizes the liberal arts curriculum. The time for individuals to have to carry masses of knowledge around in their heads should have passed away with the Gutenberg Bible. The student of the future will need great skill in knowing what he needs to know, finding it, and using it.

In short, future curricula must succeed in presenting a wide range of alternatives to students helping them learn what they find to be relevant and central to their future lives, capturing a sense of effortlessness and joy in the learning process, and focusing on a child's ability to find and use information creatively.

Dr. Allen suggests that rather than starting with the traditional disciplinary triumvirate of humanities, natural sciences and social sciences, that we should rather emphasize four areas of learning that are role-oriented rather than goal-oriented. These are:

- Human Relations
- Communications
- Aesthetics
- Technology

The function of any unit of study would be determined by the role that is anticipated for the student. Teaching will become process-oriented rather than content-oriented. Individual courses would vary in length dependent upon the function they will serve. Materials in the classroom will be topical using multi-media, with much community involvement.

TEACHING METHODOLOGY

Finally, although we have discussed various teaching techniques in our discussions such as Self-Enhancing Education in relation to self-image and inquiry method in relation to critical thinking, a third recommendation will be made that could encompass both of these techniques and would include a method of class operations.

If we are concerned with the concept of Human Dignity, then the first place to practice it would be the classroom. This should go beyond the relationship of teacher and student, but include student-to-student activity. This would best be accomplished through group and committee activities in the solution of the problems presented.

Dr. Gerard A. Poirier in his book, STUDENTS AS PARTNERS IN TEAM LEARNING,⁴ has presented such a plan that has been successfully used in a teacher training program. He emphasizes the fact the reference is to team learning rather than team teaching. He insists that the heterogeneity of the group is important. The aspects of the team learning that makes it different from normal classroom procedure are:

- The opportunity for a student to learn at his own pace.
- The opportunity for a student to use his creativity.
- The opportunity for a student to work in groups.

Poirier recommends organization of groups very carefully with students of varying ability in each group. He carefully selects leaders for each group who, in reality, become teacher aides in leading the attack of these groups on the problems selected. The teacher becomes a facilitator of learning, being responsible to the leader's ideas and team ideas presented.

The classroom becomes a group of micro-societies that will provide students the opportunity to work together, to develop empathy among team members, and to provide experience at dividing responsibilities in the solution of problems.

⁴Poirier, Students as Partners in Team Learning, Center of Team Learning, California.

CONCLUSION

The Human Dignity Social Science Curriculum would then be characterized as follows:

1. The content of the course would include the study of the various ethnic or national groups of the world. These would be compared and contrasted in terms of the Social Science Disciplines.
2. Units of study would concern present day problems that would be relevant to the student. In examining the problem, research would be involved to uncover the historical background that created the problem.
3. Controversial issues would not be avoided because the right to discuss and debate such issues is the most essential part of a student's freedom to learn.
4. The materials used in the classroom would include along with reference materials and texts: newspapers and magazines; films, filmstrips and tapes; television and radio programs; resource people; the interviews of agencies; and field trips.
5. The method of instruction would be largely one of inquiry. The student would gain experience in evaluating alternatives and making decisions based upon the facts of the case and, in turn, upon the value system he has internalized.
6. Finally, the program is developed on the principle of the heterogeneity of the classroom group. Part of the activity in the classroom would be involved in group activity in which each member of the class would, hopefully, have experience both as a follower and as a leader.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Human Dignity through the Social Sciences are:

- OBJECTIVE I. The student will demonstrate a knowledge of history with emphasis on the contributions of various ethnic and national groups.
- OBJECTIVE II. Through the study of the social sciences, the student will demonstrate the use of application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation in the study of human relations problems.
- OBJECTIVE III. Through the study of the social sciences, the student will demonstrate an increased understanding of self in terms of "Who Am I?" and "Where Am I Going?"
- OBJECTIVE IV. Through the study of the social sciences, the student will begin to develop a consistent value system in the resolution of human relations problems.
- OBJECTIVE V. Through the study of the social sciences, the student will become involved in activities related to the resolution of value conflicts.
- OBJECTIVE VI. Through the study of the social sciences, the student will demonstrate a growing appreciation of human dignity.